

6
The Practice of Confounding the Distinction between Good and Evil Consider'd, and Expos'd.

I N A
S E R M O N

PREACH'D At
St. Mary's in OXFORD,
Before

Mr. Justice P O W E L L,

A N D

Mr. Justice G O U L D;

And Before the
University of OXFORD,
A T T H E

ASSIZES Held There, Mar. 4. 170⁷/₈.

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Publish'd at the Request of the High-Sheriff,
and the Gentlemen of the Grand-Jury.

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TO

THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL
BORLASE WARREN, Esq;
HIGH-SHERIFF of the County of
OXFORD:

AND

TO the GENTLEMEN of the GRAND-JURY.

SINCE 'tis in Compliance with Your Desire,
that the following Sermon appears in the World;
I think it needles to make any Apology for Ad-
dressing my self to You upon this Occasion. It
being Reasonable to hope, that the same Discourse
will not be wholly Unacceptable to You from the Press,
which You were pleas'd to Hear with so much Favour
from the Pulpit.

Tho' I had not the least Design of offering It in any
more publick Way, than that of Preaching; yet I
have too great a Deference for the Judgments of so
many worthy Gentlemen, to set up my Own in Oppo-
sition to Yours: and therefore readily submit to Obey
those Commands, which 'tis an Honour to Receive.

The Epistle Dedicatory.

If what is here Endeavour'd shall happen to be any way serviceable, in contributing to the Reformation of Those who create so much Prejudice to Religion, and so much Confusion to Themselves and Others, Deceiving and being Deceiv'd; The Obligation will be to You, and Your Authority. But all the Miscarriages and Imperfections of it I desire may be ascrib'd only to their true Author; who is, with great Respect,

Your most Obedient Servant,

JOSEPH TRAP

A N A S S I Z E - S E R M O N

Preach'd Before the
University of O X F O R D.

ISAIAH V. 20.

*Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil;
that put Darkneß for Light, and Light for Darkneß;
that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.*

THE infinite Distance between Good and Evil being of all things so certain, and (at least in the most important Instances) so plain and manifest; it may appear strange at first sight, that there should be any Occasion of denouncing a general Woe against those that endeavour to transpose, or misrepresent them. Because one would think it impossible there should be such Men in the World; or any that should engage in a Design which seems so extravagant and impracticable. And yet such is the Perverseness of Mankind; industrious in Wickedness and ingenious to their own Destruction; that even these daring Attempts are continually made: Men seeming insolently to affect a Power beyond that of Omnipotence it self, the Reconciling of Contradictions. And in managing these eternally opposite Principles they are so far successful, that tho' they cannot *reconcile*, they can at least *confound*; and very often actually do it with great Satisfaction. Which is the Practice and Guilt of Those, who are here so severely threaten'd.

The main Scope and Design of this Chapter, is to represent God's Complaint against his People the *Jews*; in which, by the

generacy and Corruption; and their proving obstinately Disobedient, contrary to what He had the greatest Reason to expect from them, considering the extraordinary Care which had been taken on his Part to cultivate and instruct them. This, at the Beginning of the Chapter, is elegantly insinuated in the Parable of a Vineyard: and tho' the Comparison be in it self so easy and natural, that it seems to need no Application; yet to make it evident beyond all Doubt, He applies it in exprefs Words to that revolting and rebellious People. *Verf. 7. For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant Plant; and He look'd for Judgment, but behold Oppression; for Righteousness, but behold a Cry.* And after having in general reprehended them for their shameful and most inexcusable Apostacy, He proceeds to expose some of their particular Abominations, denouncing Vengeance against each of them severally; their Covetousness, Pride, and Luxury, and among the rest that which is describ'd in my Text; *Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness; that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.*

Expositors, without mentioning any other Sense of the Words, commonly understand them as relating to the Sin of *Injustice*, especially to that which is of a *Judicial* nature; and as levell'd against Those who being entrusted with the publick Administration of Judgment, pervert the Course of it by putting Wrong for Right and Right for Wrong, by determining Causes contrary to Law, Reason, and Equity; by acquitting the Guilty, and condemning the Innocent. And, because the present solemn Occasion requires it, I shall, in the Progress of my ensuing Discourse, have a particular Regard to this Interpretation. But tho' that be *one*, yet most certainly it is not the *only* Design of the Words: which are plainly to be understood in *general* of all Persons of what Quality or Condition soever, who labour to *invert the Nature of Things* by *miscalling* and *disguising* them; who by Blending and Shuffling of Ideas endeavour to transpose even *Contraries* themselves, and confound the *N*'ons of *Good* and *Evil*. In this wider Acceptation it will, I conceive, be proper to discourse upon the Words; only to take particular Notice, as we go along, of every thing which falls in our way, relating to the Administration of Judgment and Justice.

It is too plain to require any Proof, that *Light* and *Darkness*

distinct from those other Terms, *Good* and *Evil*; but only as figurative and illustrating Expressions meaning the same Thing. 'Tis certain they are not to be taken in a proper Signification; for besides that those Things are not of a *Moral* Nature, and so can have no Connection with any Point of *Duty* or *Transgression*; They cannot (strictly speaking) be transvers'd, or put one for another. Some sorts of *Good* and *Evil* indeed being mix'd and complicated Conceptions, not only the *Words*, but the very *Ideas* may be confounded; but *Light* and *Darkness* being sensible ones, the *Ideas* cannot be transfer'd, tho' the *Words* may. However, *Good* and *Evil* are full as opposite in their *Natures*, as any sensible contrary Qualities whatsoever; tho' the former may be more easily mistaken for each other, than the latter. And their being as opposite as *Light* and *Darkness*, *Bitter* and *Sweet*, and the like, is the Reason why those Metaphorical Expressions are made use of to illustrate the Contrariety that is between them.

In discoursing upon the Words thus explain'd I shall consider,

First, How far the Names and Notions of *Good* and *Evil* are Capable of being Confounded, Transpos'd, and put one for another.

Secondly, When, or in what particular Instances Men are often Actually guilty of such Misrepresentation.

Thirdly, What are the chief Causes and Principles of so perverse a Practice.

Fourthly, The extreme Wickedness, and destructive Consequences of it. And,

Lastly, What we must do to secure our selves from being seduc'd and deluded by it.

I. As to the First of These; The *Notions* of *Good* and *Evil* in general cannot be chang'd, nor transpos'd, nor the Distinction between them be taken away. *Pleasure* and *Pain*, *Happiness* and *Misery* are such very clear and distinct Sentiments; that, as 'tis impossible they should themselves be mistaken for each other, so they will for ever sufficiently distinguish those Principles which are apt to cause and produce them. The *Names* indeed may be alter'd, like those of *Light* and *Darkness*; but these Conceptions can no more be varied or transfer'd, than those. The *Words* likewise may be us'd promiscuously: which

indeed will make Men talk so as not to be understood; but will not confound these Eternally distinct Conceptions. A third obscure, and unintelligible Notion may also (perhaps) arise out of them. And in these Instances seems to consist all the Confusion that Good and Evil in *general* are Capable of. How far *particular* ones may be mix'd and disguis'd, must be our next Enquiry.

That *particular* Thing then which is really Good may by false Names and Colours be represented as Evil; and so on the Reverse. Thus it happens in the Case of *Moral* Good and Evil: Vice in general may be recommended, and Vertue in general decry'd; and the same Misrepresentation may be made with respect to any particular Vertue or Vice, or any Good or Bad Action. But then Vertue and Vice in *general* cannot be put for *each other*, any more than Good and Evil in *general*, or Light and Darkness: *These* Conceptions, like *Those*, being so clearly and distinctly opposite; and to observe, and not observe Laws, being Terms of direct Contradiction. Nor can the *Distinction* between them be taken away, while they *at all remain in the Mind*. Indeed it may be lost *one way*, because the *Ideas themselves* may be lost and expung'd out of the Minds of Men; which is to be done only by destroying the Notions of all Law and all *Moral* Obligation, upon which the Nature of Duty and Transgression entirely depends. But I say, while these Notions are in their Minds, they can never be transfer'd, or mistaken for each other.

The main Difficulty therefore, and the greatest Danger of Mistake and Confusion is between *particular Vertues* and *Vices*; which may easily be transpos'd and misrepresented by Reason of the great Number of *subordinate* Ideas which concur in the Composition of these *more complex* ones, the particular various *Circumstances* attending them, and that *Shadow of Resemblance* which is sometimes between them. Their true Limits and Boundaries are not always palpably manifest; and some are much more easy to be mistaken than others, by Reason of the seeming Nearness and Affinity of their Natures. Here not only the *Names*, but the very *Notions* may be mix'd, by leaving out some of the true constituent Parts, and taking in those that are foreign, and belong to another Combination. But though those Vertues and Vices are *most liable* to be confounded which have some Appearance of *Likeness* and Resemblance; yet sometimes Men may be so infatuated, as to put the most monstrous Crimes for laudable Qualities, and the most illustrious Moral Ex-

lencies for Sins. Here 'tis hard to conceive that the *Ideas* are chang'd, tho' 'tis not impossible but they may; 'tis certain the *Names* are perverted; and the Misapplication of Words never fails to confound the Notions themselves, whenever they are Capable of such Confusion.

But after all, Good and Evil, Vertue and Vice both in the general, and in particular Instances, continue *in themselves* just as they were before, notwithstanding this Mixture of Words and Conceptions. This alters not the Natures of Things; but they still remain unvariably the same. For tho' these *Moral Ideas* are of a very different kind from *sensible* ones, which without any Action of ours are excited in us by outward Objects, and in the Production of which we are purely passive; tho' they are made up by the Operation of the Mind, which joins together the several Parts of which they are compounded; yet in this Case also there is such a thing as *real Nature* without us, to which they all ought to be refer'd. The *Eternal Ideas* in the Mind of God are the Patterns and Standards of *ours*; and the latter are only so far true, as they agree and correspond with the former. This Rule (which, so far as we are concern'd in it, is by the Light of Reason and Revelation together sufficiently discover'd to us) is that which we are to observe in forming these compound Notions. Which (tho' they are collected by our *voluntary* Thoughts and Reflections, yet) are not so far *Arbitrary*, that we are at Liberty to make them at random, or according to our own Will and Pleasure. If we do, we are guilty of very grievous Sin, as I shall shew in its proper place; and at last, we do not *change* Things, but only *misapprehend*, or *misrepresent* them; this *Confusion* no more altering the Nature of Good and Evil, than a *Mask* or a *Disguise* can alter the Nature of a Man.

Having thus dispatch'd the first Thing I propos'd, and endeavour'd to shew how far the Names and Notions of Good and Evil are *capable* of being confounded; I proceed now to my Second, in which I am to consider,

II. When, or in what particular Instances Men are often *Actually* guilty of such Misrepresentation.

Tho' it seems the clearer Method to consider this in a Head distinct from the former, yet there is so near a Connection between them

that a great Part of what is to be insisted upon in *This*, has been unavoidably touch'd upon in *That*. But now to prosecute this Subject a little more at large; Men are guilty of the Sin, and obnoxious to the Punishment express'd in my Text,

1. By disguising and mixing *Truth with Falshood* in their Reasoning and Speculations, or endeavouring to give the one the Air and Resemblance of the other. For These (especially in matters of Importance) are properly Good and Evil, being the Objects of the Will as well as of the Understanding. We universally desire Knowledge, and hate as natural an Aversion for Ignorance and Error. And there is all the Reason in the World that we should; since our Happiness or Misery so greatly depends upon our right or wrong Information. Whosoever therefore puts Falshood for Truth, if the Subject be of any Consequence to us, may with the utmost Propriety be said to put Evil for Good; in the more *Vulgar* Phrase he puts *Darkness* for *Light*, which upon himself and others he imposes Error for Argument, and Lies instead of Demonstration. In this Guilt are involv'd all Those (and too many such there are in the World) who by their ridiculous Sophistry, and impudent Pretences to Reason, make it their Business to dispute against the Principles of Christianity; nay, endeavour to take away all Distinction between Vertue and Vice, or to prove that there is no such thing as either; to obliterate all Notions of Law and Obedience, and make Religion no better than a mere State-Engine or Tool of Policy.

Nor is it easy to be imagin'd how Those will entirely get clear of this Imputation, who in matters of very great moment (tho' more than the Being of Religion) argue contrary to the Reason and common Sense of all Mankind. As if (for Example) any one should insist upon it, that the way to support an Establish'd Constitution is to admit its Enemies into its Bowels; or that the true Method to discourage any Faction of Men, is to entrust them with Power and Authority.

2. Men bring this Guilt upon their Souls by recommending Vice and traducing Vertue; by representing the former as fit to be embrac'd, and the latter as undesirable. Which indeed supposes the Practice of willful fallacious Reasoning, mention'd in the former Particular: but then it supposes something else, and is a more direct Method of putting Good and Evil for each other. This is the Employment of Those who endeavour to persuade the World that

ligion is an uneligible Thing; a melancholy, dismal, and uncomfortable Institution, attended only with Inconveniencies, and destitute of Rewards: on the other side applauding a Wicked Course, as the only way to Pleasure and Happiness, as being most agreeable to human Reason, and the true Use of our natural Appetites. These, and such like are the perverse Arguings of some Men, who *spoil themselves and others thro' Philosophy, (falsely so call'd) and vain Deceit, after the Rudiments of the World, and not after Christ.* Hither likewise is to be reduc'd the detestable Practice of Scoffing at Religion, or endeavouring to render it ridiculous; and that of labouring to bring Vice into Credit and Reputation. Of the same Nature is all this Guilt when it respects any *particular* Vertue or Vice, or even any *single Action* of either; when by Slander or Ridicule We strive to make the former either Odious, or Contemptible, and by as false Representation to procure Love, or Reverence for the latter. Thus Forgiveness of Injuries shall be condemn'd by some as Pernicious, and laugh'd at by others as Weakness and Folly. Profaneness and all Manner of Debauchery shall pass for very desirable Qualities and the Accomplishments of a Gentleman; Revenge for a Proof of Valour, and Murder for the Vindication of One's Honour. But

Colos. 2. 8.

3. The Guilt here mention'd is *chiefly*, and most commonly contracted by putting some *particular* Vertues and Vices *for each other*; which is especially done between those which seem to have some Resemblance, and so are more easy to be confounded and disguis'd. Now, and how easily this may be effected, We have already consider'd; and every Day's Experience affords Us Examples in Abundance of its being actually put in Practice. On the one hand for Instance, according as Occasion requires, Humility is call'd Littleness of Spirit, Meekness Cowardise, and Bravery Ostentation: Frugality passes for Covetousness, Generosity for Extravagance, Courage for Rashness, and a due care of one's Reputation for Pride and Vain-glory. And it is as true, on the other hand, that these Vices, with many more which We need not mention, as often go under the Name and Shadow of those adjacent Vertues. As Covetousness has the Stile of Frugality, Cowardise Meekness; and so in the other Instances.

But this fantastical Inversion of the Notions of Things is chiefly to be observ'd in those which are of a *publick* and *popular* Nature; be-
cause the Temporal Interests of Men, and the Prejudices of Parties

Thus a firm Adhesion to the best and noblest Principles shall be Obstinacy or Pride; and a due Fervour in the Vindication of them shall be Rage and Fury: while on the other side, Indifferency and Lukewarmness shall have the good Luck to pass for Charity, Unsteadiness for Complaisance, and Baseness for Condescension. Nay, it shall be esteem'd Good-nature to be unconcern'd in the Cause of a good Conscience, Prudence to desert it, and Moderation to betray it. And so great is the Inequality of Dispensations, with respect to *different Cases and Persons*, that Zeal shall be unpardonable in the best of Causes and meritorious in the worst: a true Religious Warmth in the Resolute Discharge of his Duty, tho' perfectly free from all Unchristian and even all undecent Passion, shall be Violence and Uncharitableness in one Man; while in Defence of the most unjustifiable Practices, and in Prosecution of as bad Designs, the bitterest Railing, and the most implacable Malice shall be Calmness, and Temper, and Moderation in Another. So that here is not only the *Absurdity* of transforming Vertue and Vice; but this strange Transformation is wrought by *Means* which seem to have a quite *different* Tendency. If such preposterous Changes must be made, one would think it should be always something Evil which should make *Good look like Evil*, and so on the other side. But sometimes happens quite contrary; and there is, it seems, so much Holiness in a wicked Cause that it can consecrate Vice, and so much Profaneness in a good One that it will debase and unsanctify Vertue.

And tho' (as was said) those good and bad Qualities are most likely to be confounded, which seem to have some Affinity in the Natures: yet sometimes Men have so long accusom'd themselves to this way of Fallacy and Collusion, insensibly sliding from one Degree of it to another; that they are at last come to such a Pitch as to dignify the most monstrous Crimes with the Stile of Religion. As Schism, Murder, Rebellion, Sacrilege, and Regicide, and a Thousand other Enormities, were once by a most unheard-of Multitude or Comprehension, all included under the general Notion of Reformation and Zeal for God's Glory; nay, the grossest Villanies were put for those very Duties to which they are Diametrically opposite; Rebellion was Loyalty, and Fighting against the King was Fighting for Him. Such amazing Infatuation, or such an unaccountable Degree of Lying may Men at last arrive to; nor can any Man Determine where they will probably stop, when once they

And as Vices are sometimes honour'd with the Titles even of those Vertues to which they are most directly contrary; so on the other hand there are not wanting some, who slander and traduce particular Vertues by giving them the Names of their very opposite Vices. Thus of a Man truly poor in Spirit and lowly in his own Eyes, it shall be said that his pretended Humility is nothing but Pride, and that he is really Proud by seeming to be Humble. Such Reflections as these are often most injuriously made: 'Tis true, it sometimes happens that the Case is really so; but still we are very Blameable in making such Judgments at random, or without due Consideration. Those Qualities being so very opposite, Men ought to be fully assur'd that they are put for each other, before they pass such nice and critical Censures. For if the Person thus condemn'd be not a Hypocrite, he that condemns him is plainly a Slanderer; and if the one does not call Evil Good, 'tis most certain that the other calls Good Evil.

The Mention of Hypocrisy suggests another Instance of the Sin we are discoursing of, which is to be rank'd under this third Particular; it being the Business of the Hypocrite to make his Vices pass for Vertues, and deceive the World by a continued Cheat and Imposture.

As for nice Cases relating to single Actions or Circumstances, these are sometimes really and in their own Nature difficult to be distinguish'd. This therefore does not properly belong to our present Subject; it not being very material, and it being sometimes hard on the most honest and industrious Enquirers to determine in these emergencies. So that if they should happen to be in the wrong, they would not be guilty of that Misrepresentation of which we are now discoursing.

If it be enquir'd, whether Vice be so often put for Vertue, as Vertue for Vice; it seems probable that it is not. Because Men do not altogether so much serve their Ends and Interests by the former, as by the latter. And for the same reason perhaps it is not so easy to be done, because not so much Practis'd; the World not being so custom'd to this way of Deceiving. Not but that in the Nature of the Thing it self it may be as easy as the other, perhaps easier. It requires less Skill and Pains to paint a beautiful Face disagreeable, than a disagreeable one beautiful.

Those are eminently and signally chargeable with the Crime

of publick Justice, endeavour to pervert the Course of it, and hinder it from taking its due Effect. This Case is different from all those abovemention'd; inasmuch as it does not relate to Religion in general, nor even to any particular Vertues and Vices: but only to single Facts, Causes, and Circumstances, which alone are the Objects of Judicial Enquiries. If *Judges* then proceed not uprightly between Man and Man in matters of controverted Rights and Possessions; or in criminal Cases condemn the Innocent, and let the Guilty go free; if *Advocates* labour by the Flourishes of Wit and Eloquence to gild and set off Injury and Oppression, to burnish and brighten a wicked Cause, or to cloud, blacken, and asperse a good One; by fallacious Subtilties to give a wrong Turn to the Merits of it, to baffle and confound Witnesses in order to evade the Evidence which is laid before them; if *Both* endeavour to elude Right and Equity by bending and warping the Laws contrary to their natural Tendency, and torturing them till they speak a sense which they know nothing of: what is all this but putting *Evil for Good, and Good for Evil* in the plainest and most Emphatical sense of the words? Hither also is to be refer'd the Guilt of Bribery, Subornation, and False-witnessing; and in short every Kind or Degree of Corruption in all Persons whatsoever, who any way belong to the Courts of Judicature, so as to have a share in the Administration of Justice. Or if these Practices be not manifestly enough imply'd in my Text, the words a very little after it are sufficiently plain, *vers. 23.* In which there is a particular Woe denounc'd against Those, *who justify the Wicked for Reward, and take away the Righteousness of the Righteous from him.*

And thus having Endeavour'd to shew how far Good and Evil are *Capable* of being put for each other, and in what Cases they are often *Actually* so confounded; I pass on to consider in the Third Place,

III. What are the *Chief Causes and Principles* of so perverse Practice.

These then, according to the more general Division, seem reducible to Two;

*IGNORANCE, and
PREJUDICE.*

1. As to the *former*, 'Tis hardly to be imagin'd that this is often or in many Instances the Cause of it. Some few perhaps that are call'd Rational Creatures may be so grossly Ignorant, as not to know the plainest and most common Distinctions of Morality: And this not only in any *Christian*, but even in any *Civiliz'd* Country must be voluntary and affected. Many more, no doubt, may be Ignorant in lower and less important Instances; and this, tho' bad enough, cannot be near so dangerous or so inexcusable as the other. But

2. *Prejudice* is the chief and most frequent Cause of this Misrepresentation. When a Man knows well enough what is Right and Wrong, but by the force of Prepossession will not own it. Having a strong Bias upon his Will in favour, or disfavour of any Person or Cause; he wrests the Notions of Things to his own Purposes, and disguises Good and Evil to serve those Ends which he aims at. Being suborn'd by his Will he speaks against his Judgment, so long will he spoils and misleads his Judgment; thus first deceiving others, and afterwards himself. But because there are Prejudices of various Kinds which are the Causes of this pernicious Practice; (for any particular Vice, Folly, Opinion, Passion, or even Humour may some time or other be the Principle from whence it flows) I shall mention some of the more eminent and remarkable ones; it being endless to take notice of them all. The Prejudices then which are most likely to be the Causes of this Confusion are those of Custom and Education; of worldly Interest; of a craving Appetite; of Shame; of Pride and Envy; and lastly, of a wicked Life in general.

1. As to the first of these Prejudices, that of *Custom* and *Education*; is sufficiently known with what Zeal and Eagerness those Principles and Opinions are commonly defended, which Men have been bred up to, or to which they have been long habituated; with what passionate fondness they are lov'd, and with what Idolatry they are worship'd and ador'd. Rather than part with these Darlings of their Souls, they will assert any thing, or deny any thing; reject the plainest proofs, and digest the most shocking Contradictions. For shall they recede from a Persuasion which they were born to, and which they inherit like their Estates? A Persuasion which all their Friends are envious of, and which their Conversation has so diligently cultivated and improv'd? No, sooner shall the Order of Nature be inverted; Black shall be White, and Truth Falshood. And instead of

which Reason or Scripture has sufficiently laid down, they make that Principle the Rule and Standard of every thing else; that which agrees with it is Good, and whatever contradicts it is Evil. So that these *even having the Law, are a Law unto Themselves*; but then that Law is not *Conscience*, but *Prepossession*; which they set up in Opposition to the clearest Light that can be given them. And thus by a strange and unaccountable Privilege, the *Custom* of any particular Set or Faction of Men shall supersede or over-rule the standing and written *Laws* not only of their *Country*, but even of *God* himself.

2. The mighty Sway which *temporal Interest* bears in the World, and the exceeding strong Biass which it puts upon Men's Minds even to make them transpose Contraries themselves, is likewise too manifest to be long insisted upon. 'Tis for this that they so carefully disguise the Vices which they have, and pretend to the Vertues which they have not: 'tis this that makes them Act contrary to common Honesty, and Argue contrary to common Sense; that can make a Peace-maker guilty, and a Murderer innocent; Loyalty unpardonable, and Treason meritorious. And, what is yet more wonderful, that which is good or Evil one Day shall be quite contrary the next; not upon any Alteration of Circumstances in the Thing, but in the Person that judges of it: as the same Object appears in Colours different from what it did before, not upon the Account of any Change in it self, but in the Eye that sees it. The strange Power which temporal Interest has to pervert Men's Understandings, and make them confound the Distinctions of Right and Wrong, is in the Scriptures elegantly expressed by *blinding their Eyes*. Thus Samuel the great Judge of Israel at his Resigning that high and honourable Employment, challenges the People to lay any Corruption to his Charge; *Whom have I oppress'd and at whose hand have I receiv'd any Bribe to blind mine Eyes therewith* 1 Sam. 12. 3. And Deut. 16. 19. *Thou shalt not wrest Judgment, Thou shalt not respect Persons, neither take a Gift; for a Gift doth blind the Eyes of the Wise, and pervert the Works of the Righteous*. And in many other Instances besides this of Corruption in Judgment, Men's Eyes are frequently thus blinded; even then, when they are said to be enlighten'd.

3. Another Prejudice which is apt to occasion this Prevarication, is that of a *craving* and unruly *Appetite*. Being hard press'd by the easiness of a longing Inclination to any forbidden Pleasure, and

use all the Fallacies and Treacherous Reasonings they are Masters of, to *prove* that Lawful which they would fain *have* so, and to make their Lusts reconcileable with their Duty. Such pains will they take to cheat and delude themselves; and very slight Arguments will be effectual to deceive Those who not only are willing, but labour to be deceiv'd.

4. The *Shame* of wicked or dishonourable Actions is sometimes the Occasion of this Misrepresentation. When a Man has done, or is about to do a foolish or unwarrantable Thing; and has the Baseness, or Unlawfulness of it fairly laid before his Eyes, and urg'd home upon his Conscience: rather than take that Shame upon him which is his Due, He will use all imaginable Arts to palliate and disguise those Vices or Follies which 'tis impossible to justify. This is especially the Case of those who are Prejudic'd by Fear and Cowardise; who would be good Men, if they durst; and have Inclination to do their Duty, but want the Courage. These are put to a thousand Shifts and Evasions to bring themselves off, and appear with a tolerable Grace; endeavour to alter the Nature of those Actions which they cannot defend; and rather chuse to have Religion represented in false Colours, than Themselves in their true ones.

5. Men often turn Vertue into Vice, and condemn what they ought to praise; when they are acted by the Prejudices of *Spight* and *Malice*. Nothing is more common than to hear them inveigh against those they hate, even for that which deserves to be honour'd and rewarded. Their first Endeavour indeed is commonly to alledge false matter of Fact, and deny that the Persons they are prepossess'd against ever did those Things, or have those Qualities which are pretended and suppos'd. But if that will not do, they immediately betake themselves to the other Method; and rather than One they detest shall be thought to have any Good in him, Good it self shall be Evil, and Merit an Abomination.

6. It frequently proceeds from a Principle of *Pride* or *Envy*. I mention these together, because the latter is often a Consequence or Effect of the former: and Men endeavour to lessen the Characters of Others, in order to heighten and recommend their own. By the Prejudices therefore of Vain-glory and Self-conceit, they strive to make Deformity it self appear Beautiful in their own Persons; and by the tainting Breath of Envy labour to blast and wither the most flourishing *Graces* with which others are adorn'd. Sometimes to gratify these

vicious Appetites, they are for an universal Levelling of Characters, and almost making all Mankind alike. By lessening the good Qualities of some, and the bad ones of others, they endeavour to put all upon an Equality; by which Means they hope to make themselves appear as well as the rest of their Neighbours; which they are sensible they cannot do, without taking these indirect Measures, and bringing down Others to their own Size and Dimensions. Upon the same Motive of Pride they often contract this Guilt merely to humour the ridiculous Vanity of Jestings; especially if it be join'd with the Spirit of Trifling and Levity: They think it an Argument of a vivacious Genius to call the most serious Things in the World by contrary Names; and pretending to be Wits, are really Fools.

7. The last and worst Prejudice which I assign'd as a Cause of this detestable Practice, was that of a *profligate Life in general*. Those *particular* Vices and Follies above mention'd may be, and often are the Occasions of it in particular Instances, or inferior Degrees: but an entire Habit of Wickedness puts Men upon the most desperate Attempts to undermine all Religion; which they cannot hope to do by any likelier Methods, than by that of which we are discoursing. A flagitious and dissolute Course of Living makes Infidels of some, Scepticks of others, and Enemies to God and Goodness of All. And those to whom either of these Characters belongs, will be apt to endeavour to take away all Distinction between the most contrary and most important Notions of Morality. So that they labour to pervert the Ideas of Religion because they live in constant Opposition to it; and put Darknes for Light, upon the same Principle that they love Darknes rather than Light; because their Deeds are Evil.

Which brings me to consider in the 4th place,

IV. The extreme *Wickedness* and *Destructive Consequences* of this execrable Practice.

That the Guilt of it is most heavy, and its Tendency pernicious, is plainly imply'd in the Words of my Text; which denounces Woe and Vengeance against it. Nor can it be conceiv'd to be otherwise, if We consider only the above mention'd Principles from which it flows; it being impossible that any but very bad Effects should proceed from such corrupt Causes. To put Good and Evil for each other in any sense, even in the lowest Cases and Degrees, must be to

and provoking to Almighty God. But to do it in the most important Instances, and that too with Deliberation and Malice, is undoubtedly the boldest and most exalted Pitch of Wickedness. 'Tis directly doing the Devil's Work for him; and He himself cannot more effectually advance the Interest of his Kingdom. By spoiling Men's Understandings, blinding their Judgments, perverting their Reason, and in short making the whole Intellectual World a perfect Chaos and Mass of Confusion; It quites unravels the Scheme of Morality, and breaks up the very Foundations of all Religion. That it does so is plain, and needs no Proof; for when the Notions of Good and Evil, of Vertue and Vice are thus huddled and confounded; how is it possible for any such thing as Religion to subsist in the World? And then it is the highest Insolence against God that can well be imagin'd; not only to break his Laws, but to pretend even to cancel and repeal them.

And what must be the Consequences of it with respect to the Peace, Society, Government, and Well-being even of this World, is not at all difficult to determine. How many miserable Souls then must perish everlastingly by it in the next? And what therefore must be the punishment of Those who are involv'd in this most horrid Guilt of contriving the eternal Destruction of others, and ruining so many Thousands besides themselves?

Nor ought it in some Instances to escape unpunish'd even in This Life. Shall Those who contradict the fundamental Principles of Morality, and even the common Reason of Mankind, traduce the great Truths of Christianity, and endeavour to destroy the very Being of Government either in Church, or State; and by so doing put Light for Darkness, and Good for Evil, with the coolest and most deliberate Malice, and in the most publick and impudent Manner, shall such be conniv'd at, and suffer'd to go on with Impunity? Certainly the Ends and Maxims even of human Government require that they should not; and these (if any) are *Iniquities to be punish'd by the Judges.*

Joh 31.12.

And accordingly our wise and pious Legislators have made Provision in this Particular: and surely it is the Duty of all Persons in their several Stations, as much as in them lies, and as far as it properly belongs to them, to promote the Execution of the Laws against such Offenders; of private Subjects to convict, and of Magistrates to punish them. Nor is it without Reason that this is here mention'd. The wicked, and even Blasphemous Books which are publish'd

than sufficient Occasion for these Reflections. Infamous Libels upon almost every thing that's Good; which defy all Authority both Humane and Divine, tend to the Unhinging of all Government, especially the Ecclesiastical, to the Annulling of all sacred Ministerial Orders, and to the utter Extirpation of all Christianity:

Tho' such desperate abandon'd Wretches as the Authors of these Writings are fitter to be dealt with by Penalties than by Arguments, yet to the Confusion of their little Reasonings they have had the latter afforded them, which they do not deserve; and therefore sure they are not hardly dealt with, if they have likewise the former which they do deserve. For certainly Men ought not to be at Liberty to dispute about any thing, or to vent what notions they think fit. It may perhaps be call'd *Persecution*, or a Hindrance to *free Thinking* to entrench upon this Privilege which they have *so natural a Right to*: but for all that, they have not this uncontrollable Licence in Cases which are of a much lower and less important Nature. Let them be as free Thinkers as they please, they are not suffer'd (and 'tis not fit they should) to question the Titles of Kings; and shall God's be question'd? They are punish'd (and that very justly) for slandering, or even speaking irreverently of Princes; nay, of Subjects who are invested with Power and Authority: and shall they be permitted to blaspheme Christ, and deny God the absolute Government of the World? Must there be a Toleration too for such Hellish Outrages as these? Shall it be suggested without a severe Ani-

*Rights of
the Christ.
Church.
pag. 151.*

*Account of
the Growth
of Deism in
England,
pag. 7.*

Jer. 5. 9.

madversion, "That God's Right to reign over the *Jews* as their Prince, was founded upon Contract? Shall it be said (tho' with never so much Artifice, and in the pretended Person of Another) that "if those Writings, which the Clergy call Scriptures, are of their side, there is no doubt but they are of their own Inventing "And if *Jesus Christ* their Patron, laid the Foundation of those Powers which they claim to themselves under him, the old Roman "did him Right in punishing him with the Death of a Slave? Shall not God visit for these Things, and shall not his Soul be avenged of such a Nation as this? If Men are suffer'd to commit all these Abominations, and to publish such horrid Blasphemies; what can we expect, but ill Success in our Affairs? For how can we think that God will espouse our Cause, if we so tamely and scandalously desert His?

These which I have mention'd, and such like Insolencies in Wickedness will Those at last advance to, who have given themselves over to such a Licence and Dissolution of Principles, to such a Libertinism of Reasoning as well as Living, and have thrown off all those Restraints which God has ordain'd to curb the unruly Lusts and Appetites of Men. These likewise are the Effects of their implacable Rage and Fury against those sacred Ordinances which He has instituted: they will stick at Nothing to gratify that Rancour and Violence with which they are transported; but defy God, rather than not shew their Spight against his Church; and disgorge their Malice, tho' by swallowing Blasphemy.

But, as the difference of Persons may alter the Degrees of Guilt; some, according to the Stations in which they are plac'd, are more unpardonable in putting Good for Evil and Evil for Good, than others. And those in whom it would be most intolerable, are Persons of a sacred Character. If They, whose Judgment and Authority are, or ought to be, of so much weight, whose proper Business it is to interpret the Scriptures, and truly represent the Mind of God; if They out of Fear, or Hope, or any sinister Design, should deliver that for Vertue which they know or believe to be Vice; or any way prevaricate, and *handle the Word of God deceitfully; of how sore a Punishment* 2 Cor. 4. 2. *would these be thought worthy,* who would mislead the Souls committed to their Charge, prostitute their high and holy Office to such vile Purposes, and bring a Reproach upon that Profession which they ought to adorn. Our Blessed Saviour assures us, that whosoever *shall break the least of his Commandments, and TEACH MEN SO, shall be call'd* Mat. 5. 19. *the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.* Should any then of that sacred Order make Panegyricks upon the worst of Men, only because they are great Men; smooth over some of their Vices, and praise them for others; flatter the Dead, to make their Court to the Living; and all at the Expence of their Integrity, by venting false Doctrine as well as false Oratory, in order to advance their Fortunes, and serve their wretched Interests in this World: what a Mass of Guilt would they heap upon Themselves! They would imitate the Example of Judas in betraying their Lord's Religion for Money, as that other Traytor did his Person; and without the severest and a *Timely* Repentance, would by the worst Sort of Simony pay their Souls as the Purchase for their Preferments.

Nay, we who are dedicated to that holy Employment may, in some measure be *negatively* guilty in this respect. We sin not only if we represent Good and Evil falsely, but if we decline or avoid the Opportunities of representing them truly: if we be silent when our Duty calls us to speak; or if, when we do speak, we *prophecy* only *smooth things*; if we do not proceed according to the Command of God given to the Prophet of my Text: *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy Voice like a Trumpet; and shew my People their Transgressions, and the House of Jacob their Sins.*

And so from the Consideration of the extreme Guilt, and destructive Consequences of this Misrepresentation, I proceed in the Fifth and last place to consider,

V. What Measures we must take that we may not be *seduc'd* and deluded by it.

Now all the Cautions that are to be given under this Head are equally useful in order to avoid thus deceiving our selves, and being so deceiv'd by others. To be secure then from both, we must take care to be free from all those Prejudices, Vices, and Follies before mentioned, with many more of the like Nature, which are the Causes of this Confusion; must be honest and sincere in our Purposes, and perfectly clear from all base Ends and Interests. We must likewise diligently examine the Natures of Things, and give our selves up to be guided by right Reason and Scripture; which will teach us to distinguish between Good and Evil, even in those Cases which are pretended to be intricate and abstruse. For notwithstanding this Confusion of Words and Notions there is such a Thing as Truth in the World, and it is not half so difficult to be discover'd as some are willing to believe. The true Boundaries between particular Vertues and Vices, those too which are most apt to be mistaken for each other, are not so very hard to be stated; if Men would but be at the Trouble even of a little Thinking. Thus for Example, To abstain from Rage and Unchristian Passion, to be patient of Contradiction, to return good Language for bad, and not to be inflam'd by Personal Affronts and Reflections, all concur in the Vertue of Meekness. But to suffer God's Honour to be impeach'd, or his Name to be blasphem'd without shewing any Resentment, or Rebuking the Offender: to permit wicked Men to effect their

Designs, when it is our Duty to oppose them, and perhaps in our Power to hinder them; is this Meekness? So indeed it may be call'd; but it is very plain that here that Vertue expires, and Sloth or Cowardise immediately takes place. By thus separating the constituent Ideas, and considering them distinctly one after another, and not suffering them to lie mix'd and blended together in the Mind; Men may with a little Attention in this, and other Instances clearly distinguish Vertue from Vice, and discern where one ends, and the other begins.

It will likewise be requisite often and seriously to consider the exceeding Guilt and Danger of this detestable Habit; as I have represented it in its proper place. Which if we do, we shall start with Abhorrence at the Prospect, abstain from all Appearance of this Evil, nor dare to 'venture upon the least Link of this fatal Chain, which draws so many dismal Consequences after it. And those that are already intangled in this Guilt, if they would but consider Things, would soon endeavour to extricate themselves out of a Snare so pernicious and destructive. But if they are resolv'd to be obstinate and thoughtless, they must persevere in their Practices, till they receive the Reward of them; and *lift up those Eyes in Hell* which they willfully shut before they came thither. And when they find themselves in *that place of Torment*, they will perceive to their eternal Confusion, that the Art they have been so long accusom'd to will fail them there; nor will they be able, with all their Skill and Sophistry to prove that Evil to be Good, that Darkness to be Light, or that Bitter Cup of God's Vengeance to be Sweet.
